

INCREDIBLE FINISH AS ILFORD PULL BACK TO 3-3

By STUART EARP Wycombe Wanderers 3, Ilford 3

IN ONE of the most exciting second halves at Loakes Park for a long time, Wycombe Wanderers took the lead, lost it a minute later, fell 1-2 behind, equalised after 81 minutes, went in front after 83 minutes and then lost it again two minutes later to give Saturday's Rothmans Isthmian League Division One clash against Ilford an incredible 3-3 scoreline.

Wycombe's forwards have come in for their fair share of "stick" this season for not taking chances, but on this occasion all three were magnificent. Showing courage, skill and sheer hard work, they fought time and again to score, succeeded three times and on two of those occasions saw their efforts wiped out by defensive errors. They must have been shattered when Ilford finally clinched a share of these vital points five minutes from time.

Not once, but twice Ilford retaliated to score within a minute of a Wycombe goal, which made it look a formality. It wasn't and they know just what to expect when they meet the Blues at Newbury Park on November 30 in the Challenge Trophy. They must realise the result could go either way and they are unlikely to find Wycombe's defence in so generous a mood.

This 3-3 draw was a punishing result for Wycombe, for they deserved far more than a share of the spoils. Seldom have they worked as hard this term and for most of the second half they were without their outstanding defender Gary Hand. He was injured by a bad foul from Paul Scott.

Scott's foul on Hand which produced the injury was one of the few serious offences in this match and yet there were a number of "professional" fouls. From the outset, Ilford seemed hell bent on a draw and no more. They certainly weren't taking any chances, either. Whenever Wycombe threaten-

ed it was quite normal for a player to be brought down or held back while one or two of the Ilford defenders were quite obviously wasting time.

Big John Still, who signed at the club from Stotford recently, was the chief offender. He must have passed back to his goalkeeper at least 15 times, from any distance. The crowd certainly let Still know what they thought of his tactics, and gave their biggest cheer when he was booked for time wasting in the second half. Still, however, had the last laugh by scoring Ilford's first goal.

Nevertheless, it was something of a pity to see this player, who had several others, wasting their talents with a purely defensive attitude. Ilford had 11 men on the park capable of excellent football. But they only used it when they had to—or so it seemed.

All in all, there was a full team of internationals on view from seven from Ilford and five from Wycombe. On occasions the football certainly looked up to that standard but the first 45 minutes belonged almost exclusively to the home team.

Considering the battering Loakes Park had taken from the rain during the week, the pitch was in excellent shape and Wanderers went straight onto the attack from the kick-off. Keith Mead, up for a corner, failed to get any power behind a fourth-minute header and two minutes later Terry Reardon fired just wide.

With Keith Searle outjumping former Wanderer Peter

Anderson almost at will, Wycombe maintained a steady pressure on the Essex visitors. They also used the flanks well with Steve Perrin excelling. Steve had his best game of the season and his ability to get the ball across from the bye-line in tricky situations caused Ilford many anxious moments.

After two corners in succession, Ilford found themselves back on the defensive again with Howard Kennedy failing to test 'keeper Andy Williams in the 14th minute when well placed. A typical example of Perrin's by-line ability came three minutes later but Searle hit the cross just past the near post.

At times, Ilford looked distinctly rattled by the Wycombe raids and often their chances were sliced into touch. Upfront, Tony Bass was shadowed perfectly by skipper Alan Phillips who revelled in the challenge of facing the Division's top goalscorers. Bass, whose heading ability can easily destroy defences, hardly got a look in while Tony Turley and John Butterfield were kept extremely quiet in the first half. Their best moments were to come in the second period.

For the remainder of the first half Ilford were resigned to defence. Still, passing back to Williams when he could easily have taken play upfield, certainly got on the wrong side of the 2,000-plus crowd which roared Wycombe on feverently. Two corners just before the break almost gave Wanderers some deserved reward for their first half effort. From the first Kennedy drove the ball hard and low across the box but no one could get a touch and then in the 43rd minute, the Blues had the best chance of the half.

Kennedy, who along with Reardon and Mick Holfield, worked like demons throughout the match, raced onto a Tony Horsemans through ball which left him a yard clear of the Ilford defence. Instead of shooting first time, Howard tried to go around Williams who did well to parry the ball which flew out to Perrin, following up. Steve hit his shot perfectly past the already committed goalkeeper and the ball seemed destined for the net until Still, of all people, stormed back and flung himself full length to clear off the line.

Despite Wycombe's pressure, the first half had been something of a disappointment.

I expected far more from Ilford, who rarely showed any glimpses of their undoubted goalscoring power. They made up for it in the second half.

At first though, it was the Blues who again made all the running. With the new half just two minutes old, Horsemans set up a chance for Searle with another astute through ball but Williams again came out to block the shot and Deadman cleared the loose ball. This type of attack was obviously Wycombe's best tactic. Although tall and strong, both Still and Anderson are on the slow side and Wanderers' extra pace through the middle often caught them flat footed.

Gary Hand, still limping from his first-half injury, had to be replaced by Dave Alexander in the 49th minute—Reardon switching to full-back. Alexander, yet to play a full 90 minutes in a Wycombe shirt, certainly made the most of his chance. Surging through from midfield, he gave the attack more depth and width and found space almost at will against a retreating defence.

In the 52nd minute, the action really started. A mistake by Anderson, whose back pass fell

short, saw Perrin nip in and slot the ball past the oncoming Williams to give the Blues a deserved lead. Just as the crowd were celebrating, however, Ilford hit back immediately. Only a minute after the Wycombe score, Ray Eaton crossed into the box, catching the home defence wrong footed. Turley hit in one shot which hit Maskell's legs but the ball came out to Still who hammered home a rising shot into the roof of the net to make it 1-1.

Still's personal joy was short lived, however, for he went into referee Miller's notebook for time wasting in the 56th minute. That brought the first quarter of the half to a close—a quarter which contained more goalmouth action than almost the whole of the first half.

Despite the setback of conceding a goal so quickly, Wanderers kept the initiative with Holfield's pace giving Deadman, a class defender, a real testing. It was Deadman, however, who rescued his side in the 65th minute. Holfield, Alexander and Kennedy combined at full pace in one glorious movement but the final cross to Horsemans saw Deadman race in to clear just as 'Bodger' was

about to shoot for goal.

Then in the 69th minute, Wycombe went behind for the only time in the game. Birdseye gave away a free kick by bringing down Turley just outside the box. Deadman flighted over the free-kick and as Wycombe's defence stood and watched, Butterfield rose up at the near post and almost without challenge, nodded the ball over the line from three yards. It was a killing blow to Wanderers and one immediately began thinking of their unbeaten two-year record at Loakes Park in the league. We should have known better.

Showing commendable spirit and character, they fought back again with Horsemans first being thwarted by Williams and then blasting over a great chance from eight yards seconds later. This opportunity was created by Perrin, who won an 'impossible' ball from three yards and still got in his cross despite being on the turf.

Minutes later Searle was grassed as he sped into the box but the appeals for a penalty were soon drowned by Wycombe's equaliser in the 81st minute.

A corner on the top wing was half cleared to Birdseye who crossed low into the box. The ball bobbed around for seemingly ages before Alan Phillips got the final touch in one of his many scrambles.

Then with only seven minutes left, the crowd went wild as Wanderers amazingly took the lead. The goal summed up the sheer effort of the front three. Perrin began a run just inside halfway, beat Deadman's tackle on the flank and ran on. Deadman, quick to recover, tried again to rob Perrin but failed once more and from the by-line Steve crossed into the middle. Kennedy missed his attempted shot but the ball carried through to Horsemans

who showed all his experience by lifting the ball over a sea of legs and high into the net.

But there was a final chapter to this incredible game. Only two minutes after Wanderers' supposed winners, Ilford came back yet again to equalise. Butterfield, such a deadly finisher, was given too much time and space by the Wycombe back four who allowed him to run into the box and push in a shot which beat the oncoming Maskell. Turley, on the line, helped the ball on its way just to make sure.

Just what Perrin and Co. must have felt after watching their work go to waste, I don't know. And, with five minutes left it could have been even worse had Reardon not headed Anderson's effort of the line.

Three corners in the last two minutes brought hope of a final Wycombe winner, but even if they had, it would have been a good bet. Ilford would have come back again and made it 4-4!

WYCOMBE: J. Maskell, P. Birdseye, K. Mead, A. Phillips, G. Hand (sub); D. Alexander 49 mins.; Kennedy, T. Reardon, M. Holfield, A. Horsemans, K. Searle.

ILFORD: A. Williams, P. Deadman, J. Still, P. Anderson, R. Eaton, S. Barrett, P. Scott, R. Bennett, J. Butterfield, A. Bass, A. Turley. Sub: R. Carvell (not used).

Referee: B. Miller (Sidcup).

Half time: 0-0. **Goalscorers:** Wycombe: Perrin (4), Phillips (81), Horsemans (83), Ilford: Still (53), Butterfield 2 (69), (86).

Official paying attendance: 1,900. **Approximate total attendance:** 2,300.

Stewards

Wycombe Wanderers are looking for stewards to help with duties on the ground on Saturday. Anyone interested should report to Roger Lee's office at 1.30 on Saturday.